

Proofs of Conditional Salvation

by

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Introduction

Dar and I have just finished two introductory courses that teach the basics of Christianity by a major church in our area. This is a church that may have as many as 12,000 people attending its multiple services on a typical weekend. When I heard about the courses, I was overjoyed, as they were advertised to teach discipleship in the second course, what I view as one of the foremost needs in the church.

My joy was turned to sadness, however, when the class also became a forum for teaching the false doctrine of once saved, always saved (Unconditional Eternal Security), together with its step-child, antinomianism.

The teacher, in answer to a question pertaining to salvation by grace and falling away, told the hundreds assembled there that there were no scriptures that suggested we could fall away (and lose our salvation) if we had once confessed faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The speaker may have been speaking within the scope of his knowledge; I do not believe he intended to deliberately mislead the group. It often happens that once a false doctrine is stated and perpetuated, its adherents spend their time with each other, bolstering each other with their false doctrine. By not associating with people who have a different view, they become stronger and stronger in their assumption that their false interpretations are correct. The teacher of our class was affirming the message preached in recent weeks from the pulpit.

This will be an attempt to recount some of the most obvious scriptures that deal with falling away from the faith. I have already written about this in the article titled "Is the Believer Eternally Secure?" That can be found at: www.bereanpublishers.com | False Doctrines | The Doctrine of Unconditional Eternal Security | Is the Believer Eternally Secure? This will be an attempt to create a short article that will establish beyond reasonable doubt that God's salvation is freely given, but is conditioned upon a persevering faith that has many facets. We'll look at several different approaches taken by Scripture¹ to forcefully make its point.

Damnation For Falling Away

Yes, there are scriptures that actually say we will be damned if we fall away. Two come quickly to mind. The first is Hebrews 6:4-6:

⁴ It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, ⁶ if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

This is a very strong passage that states that the person it describes cannot come back to salvation. Fortunately for all of us, it is also a very narrow, applying to a specific (hopefully small) group of people. This paragraph refers to those who were thoroughly into the Christian faith. They had received the Holy Spirit – the first test to see if a person is truly a believer. They experienced the faith, doubtless having enjoyed the fruit of the spirit (tasted the heavenly gift, according to the passage). Likely they were visible Christians, as all should be who are truly in the faith. It may be because they were visible, then turned their back on the faith, that they are guilty of crucifying the Son of God again and subjecting him to public disgrace. This is a stern warning! God guards jealously the reputation of his Son.

Peter also was troubled by those who fell away, those who had been saved from the corruption of the world only to fall back into their old ways. He describes it this way, beginning with his description of false teachers:

¹⁷ These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. ¹⁸ For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by

¹ The translation we will use is *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1984 . Zondervan: Grand Rapids.

appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.¹⁹ They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.²⁰ If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.²¹ It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.²² Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud”
(2 Peter 2:17-22).

The verses that concern us are vs. 20-22, but the full context speaks of evil men who “entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.” Likely Peter is observing new believers, just beginning the walk of faith. These false teachers promise freedom and attract a following. Peter warns that if these people escaped their corrupt life in the world by coming to know our Lord and Savior Jesus, but are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off than before they began.

Just how bad off were they before? They were without God and eternally damned for lack of knowledge and faith in our Lord Jesus. Imagine being worse off than that! Because they now had knowledge of the faith but fell away, their eternal punishment will be worse. Scripture teaches that we will be punished according to the level of our knowledge (Luke 12:47-48). Naturally that is why teachers will be judged more severely (James 3:1). They are presumed to have more knowledge.

Is this falling away from the faith what Jesus was referring to when he warned: “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men?” (Matthew 5:13).

Damned For Engaging In Sin

This subject is definitely not on the politically correct list. Not only is it not in fashion to discuss sin, but being damned for engaging in sin must be almost a taboo. Nevertheless, Scripture does not shrink from the subject and neither will we.

The first, and perhaps most frightening, passage is at Hebrews 10:

²⁶ If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left,²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.²⁸ Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.²⁹ How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?³⁰ For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.”³¹ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:26-31).

² See the article “Foreknowledge or Predestination?” at www.bereanpublishers.com | False Doctrines | Calvinism |

First we see that this is a Christian writing to Christians who includes himself and his audience in his warning. Note that he says “we.” Continuing in sin is not an option for Christians who have received the knowledge of the truth. If they do deliberately keep on sinning, they have only a judgment of damnation to look forward to.

In our class, the teacher took pains to make sure everyone there understood that there is no judgment for those who once confessed faith. He said they would look forward only to rewards at the Bema seat (judgment seat of Christ). But this scripture says the opposite. This passage clearly speaks to Christians and warns them about the extreme danger of deliberately continuing in sin. It does not say they will merely lose rewards if they continue in sin, or have a less abundant life (as the teacher also said), but that they will face the raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

Could the Holy Spirit have made that any plainer? Wouldn't any fair reading of that passage say exactly what we have said? How can that be misinterpreted by so many to claim this just isn't true if you've once confessed faith in Jesus?

Likewise, Paul taught the same message several times to different churches. He did it in a more detailed way, enumerating many of the sins for which people can forfeit the kingdom of heaven. Our teacher utilized one of these passages, but then said it only applied to those who didn't know the Lord, who had never professed faith. Let's look at these to see if that is true.

¹⁹ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that **those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God** (Galatians 5:19-21).

The Galatians letter is written to the churches in Galatia – presumably to Christians. It would appear Paul wrote this to warn new believers that they could not live in sin and expect to inherit the kingdom of God. Is there any guarantee that someone who has confessed faith will not fall away and live in those sins Paul recounted? Of course not! Most of us are familiar with people who had been strong in the faith but fell away from the faith and into sin.

Paul wrote the same type of message to the Ephesians, apparently considering it was of sufficient important to warn other churches as well:

³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For **of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.** ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them (Ephesians 5:3-7).

Paul wrote this letter to the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus – Christians. Who is he warning? Paul says, “But among you . . .” He is speaking directly to them – the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus in Ephesus (plus all others who would also read the letter, including you and me). Paul's warning could hardly be more clear. Notice how he continued

in verse 6. Was he speaking of the very thing we encountered in that class as we were assured that such warnings were not intended for Christians but for unregenerate people. Even worse than not having an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (if there could be anything worse), Paul continues: “Because of such things (those sins) God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient.” Sound familiar? These are the same warnings we’ve read elsewhere.

Paul also warned the Corinthians. In the following passage, I’ve included the prior paragraph in order to get the context more easily in mind. Paul is exhorting the Corinthians about the way they are living. They are suing each other.

⁷ The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? ⁸ Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.

⁹ Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? **Do not be deceived:** Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:7-11).

In this very passage, Paul describes the people to whom he is writing as people who were washed in the blood of Jesus, who had been sanctified, and were justified (all stated in the past tense). According to Paul’s description, they had been Christians. But the prior paragraph casts grave doubt on whether they are really Christians any longer. In verse 8 Paul says they are completely defeated and that they cheat and do wrong, and they do it to their brothers. Paul warns, “Do not be deceived.” Do you suppose they had been deceived by teachers who assured them that their actions do not matter once they have confessed faith in the Lord Jesus? It sounds as if Paul is attempting to counter that very kind of deception.

Paul taught much the same to the Colossians, but this time he spoke only of punishment:

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips (Colossians 3:5-7).

Who did Paul write to? Verse 1, chapter 1, says, “To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse.” Was Paul suggesting to these Christian brothers that there were only rewards once they had confessed faith? No! He was warning them that if they engaged in sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, they would be subject to the wrath of God! We know from the prior scriptures that the wrath of God is poured out in judgment in hell. God’s wrath is NEVER poured out against a believer in discipline. God disciplines us as sons – in love (Hebrews 12:6 – “the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

Jesus himself gave us the last warning at the end of the book of Revelation:

⁸ But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

Jesus didn't mince words or try to be politically correct. He simply stated the facts. Those people who engaged in the sins he named would go to hell – the fiery lake of burning sulfur, the second death. Was Jesus simply reminding the redeemed that they wouldn't face such a fate? Not at all! He was warning everyone, believers and unbelievers alike, that those who practiced these sins should know their fate and destination would be hell.

Demand for Perseverance

If none of us could fall away from the faith, there would be no need for a call to persevere in the faith. The only call would be to come to faith. Neither would we be expected to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-19), but rather only to evangelize. Once having confessed faith, we could happily know we would remain forever. But Scripture warns repeatedly to persevere in the faith. Let's first consider Paul's warning at 1 Corinthians 15:1-2:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, **if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.**

Note who this is told to. These are people who heard Paul's preaching of the gospel. They received it. They took their stand on it. Paul says they are saved IF! Yes, he qualified the very statement by which he said they were saved. The qualification? IF you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. What if you don't hold firmly to it? Will you lose rewards? Will you simply have a less abundant life? NO! If you don't hold firmly to it, you will have believed in VAIN!

Is it clear what it means to believe in vain? Could it be stated more clearly? If so, I don't know how. It simply means, their belief would have meant nothing. Their faith would have meant nothing. They had to persevere in the faith in order for it to have force and meaning unto salvation.

Is that the only passage in which Paul taught that? No, he also said much the same to the Colossians:

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ **if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel** This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant (Colossians 1:21-23).

This is a very special passage to me. It tells the good news of the gospel in the first two verses. It is in the beginning of verse 23 that we see the qualification again. We can see from the text that Paul was writing to Christians – “he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight . . .” That can only refer to Christians. But, just as he did with the Corinthians, he made their salvation conditional. They would be

presented holy in God's sight, without blemish and free from accusation **IF!** IF they continued in the faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

The requirement wasn't just to continue in the faith. No, they must also be established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. That sounds similar to the teaching by James:

⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

Again the warning from James parallels that of Paul. God does not honor those who are unstable and double-minded. They do NOT have a saving faith. Such people cannot expect salvation – anything from the Lord. Salvation is conditioned upon established, firm perseverance in the faith.

It is interesting how Paul concluded that passage. After those verses that set forth the gospel and the requirement for perseverance, he said (last sentence, 23rd verse) this gospel – that he has just recited – was the gospel of which he, Paul, had become a servant. This is the gospel he preached!!!

The writer to the Hebrews also exhorted perseverance with a warning about those who do not persevere:

³⁵ So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. ³⁶ You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. ³⁷ For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay.

³⁸ But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."

³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved (Hebrews 10:35-39).

Paul combines the positive with the negative in this passage. He assures the believers that if they do not throw away their confidence, it will be richly rewarded. He warns them that they need to persevere so that when they have done the will of God, they will receive what he has promised. Note the first condition – they will receive what God has promised when they have done the will of God. Isn't that exactly the condition of Matthew 7:21? Only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter the kingdom of heaven?

But then comes the warning about those who shrink back – who fall away. What happens to them? Do they simply have a less abundant life? Do they have less rewards? No, they are DESTROYED! Those who believe – who persevere in the faith and do the will of God – are saved and receive what he has promised.

Jesus also commanded perseverance, even in the face of persecution and trials:

²² All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved (Matthew 10:22).

⁹“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰ At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, ¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³ but he who stands firm to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:9-13).

The latter passage deals with the end-times, when Jesus prophesies about what will happen. There will be an increase of wickedness; the love of most will grow cold. Then the clear statement with a plain meaning: many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other. The statement not only says many turned away from the faith but reveals the evidence by which all will know they are no longer in the faith – betraying and hating. Likely it is because so many desert the faith that persecution can come to those who remain faithful.

But his promise remains for those who stand firm – they will be saved. What does this imply? The statement has no meaning unless the opposite is true, i.e., that those who do not stand firm to the end will not be saved. That is exactly what we saw in the warning from the writer to the Hebrews who said that those who shrink back (do not stand firm) will be destroyed!

Eleven times New Testament writers exhort and command their readers to stand firm. See 1 Corinthians 15:58, 16:13, 2 Corinthians 1:21, 1:24, Galatians 5:1, Ephesians 6:14, Philippians 1:27, Philippians 4:1, Colossians 4:12, 2 Thessalonians 2:15, and James 5:8.

Parables Teaching Perseverance

Perhaps the most famous and instructive parable on the subject of perseverance is that of the sower. It is also most useful because Jesus explained it. First let's look at the parable as written at Mark 4:3-8,

³ “Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.”

All the people could relate to the subject. Farmers were all around them. Everyone knew the principles of farming. Nevertheless, the disciples came to Jesus and asked him to explain the parable. This is what he said:

¹⁴ The farmer sows the word. ¹⁵ Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. ¹⁶ Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ¹⁸ Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; ¹⁹ but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²⁰ Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it,

and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown” (Mark 4:14-20).

As we read this, consider what modern evangelism considers success. It is those described in verse 16, those who receive the word with joy. But, unbeknownst to the evangelist, most fall away. Some continue into the next category, hearing, perhaps continuing for a time, but they grow lukewarm and finally fall away, choked by life’s worries, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things. Are the first three categories saved? There is no evidence whatsoever, based on the rest of Scripture, that they are or could be saved. The second category lasted only a short time; the third did not persevere – they were choked! Only the fourth category persisted unto salvation, hearing the word, retaining it, and by persevering produced a crop.

Years ago I began to suspect that one of the evidences of a false presentation of the gospel is the high percentage of people who quickly desert the faith after having “made a commitment,”

said the sinner’s prayer, and confessed faith in Jesus (sometimes as Lord and Savior).³

Ray Comfort's *Bride of Heaven, Pride of Hell* confirmed my suspicions. Ray quotes statistics of a major denomination in the United States that disclosed it obtained an incredible 294,784 decisions for Christ in 1990. Yet, in 1991, it could only find 14,337 in a Christian fellowship. There were 280,447 decisions that couldn't be accounted for. The leadership had no clue as to why this happened, but could only conclude, "Something is wrong!" The trend continued. In August 1996 a leading U.S. denomination revealed that during 1995 it secured 384,057 decisions, but retained only 22,983 in fellowship. It couldn't account for 361,074 supposed conversions. Ray told of another crusade at which 600 decisions were obtained, no doubt with much rejoicing. But 90 days later, follow-up workers couldn't find even one person who was going on in his or her faith. In 1991 in Cleveland, Ohio, 400 decisions were obtained in an Inner City Outreach, but, again, later not one person could be found who continued in the faith. Ray quotes Charles E. Hackett, the Division of Home Missions National Director for the Assemblies of God in the U.S.: "A soul at the altar does not generate much excitement in some circles because we realize approximately 95 out of every 100 will not become integrated into the church. In fact, most of them will not return for a second visit."⁴

The parable of the vine and the branches is equally well known and instructive. In this parable, the Apostle John quoted Jesus:

“I [Jesus] am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up,

³For a discussion of false presentations of the Gospel, see www.bereanpublishers.com | Salvation Issues | Fraud and Deceit in the Presentation of the Gospel.

⁴Excerpted from *Fraud in the Presentation of the Gospel*, found at www.bereanpublishers.com | Salvation Issues | Fraud in the Presentation of the Gospel.

thrown into the fire and burned.⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:1-8).

There are fascinating insights in this parable. Note that all the branches Jesus refers to are in him. Yes, they are IN HIM. Those who are in Jesus are Christians. Sadly, many who are once in him do not remain. Many start, but few finish. Many fear the punishment of hell and make an initial commitment, but when it comes to serving the Master, of doing those works that God prepared in advance for them to do, they refuse and fall away. My fear is that they fall away because of bad teaching. Could they have been saved if they had been told the truth before they had been urged to make a commitment and been told what God requires of those that he will save? I think yes, many would persevere.

Who is it that cuts off the branches in Jesus that bear no fruit? It is God the Father himself. He's given them every chance to bear fruit, but they won't. The point Jesus is making in this parable is, "You MUST remain in me!" If we don't produce fruit, we won't remain, we'll be cut off.

What happens to those branches. Do they just dry up, the equivalent of not having an abundant life? NO! The warning is the very same as we see through all the other scriptures we've looked at. The branches that are cut off are picked up and thrown into the fire! Doesn't that sound familiar? Is that the lake of fire? Is that the raging fire that will consume the enemies of God? There is certainly NO suggestion that such people whom God has cut from Jesus, the vine, can be or will be saved, at least not until they come back and persevere in a saving faith. Based on the rest of Scripture, one can only conclude such people have lost the salvation that could have been theirs. Did they lose it because they were not taught properly?

There is another parable, less well-known, that illustrates the same point. The people in the parable have similar roles. God the Father is the man who had the fig tree planted in his vineyard. Jesus is the man who took care of the vineyard.

"A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any.⁷ So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'

⁸"'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it.⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'" (Luke 13:4-9).

Once again, as in the parable of the vine, God wants to cut down the fig tree that is not producing fruit. Jesus intercedes, however, wanting to try again to stimulate it into life and to get the tree to produce fruit. But note! Jesus agrees that the tree must be cut down if it does not produce fruit after being given another chance. Jesus does not intercede for us forever. Both he and the Father want, yes, demand, productive people in their kingdom.

Parables About Falling Away or Being Cast Away By God

We just saw the parable of the fig tree that didn't produce. God commanded it be cut down because it failed to produce fruit. Though Jesus interceded and gained another year, if it didn't produce fruit in that time God would cause it to be cut down. Surely the plain

language of that parable is that the person was being cut out of the Kingdom. And in the kingdom he surely was – in the Father’s vineyard.

We saw the same situation still earlier in the parable of the vine. Note again the branches (you and I) were in the vine (Jesus). To the eternal security advocate, this is the definition of salvation and eternal security. Not so, however. God the Father cuts off all the branches that are unfruitful. They are gathered up and thrown into the fire. This is the same result as the case with the fig tree that didn’t produce fruit. Ephesians 2:10 said we are to do those good works that God prepared in advance for us to do. When we fail to do that, we face being cut out of the kingdom by God.

Still another parable should be examined. It is about the servant who was an overseer for the master:

“Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?⁴³ It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns.⁴⁴ I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.⁴⁵ But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk.⁴⁶ The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers” (Luke 12:42-46).

This parable is frightening. Not only does it deal with falling away, but deals with someone in a position of responsibility within the Kingdom who becomes unfaithful and is judged for his unfaithfulness. We know he is in the kingdom to begin with as he is called a “faithful and wise manager.” In this parable, Jesus chooses alternate results. In the first result, he speaks of the servant who faithfully perseveres in his task. Jesus said the master will put him in charge of all his possessions. Then Jesus chooses the other alternative, of the servant tiring of waiting for the master, abusing the other servants and getting drunk. When the master returns he will cut him to pieces (punishment beyond what is found in any other parable) and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

In this parable everyone should find three things irrefutable. The first is that the servant began as a faithful and wise manager in the master’s household. The second is that he became unfaithful. The third is that he was cast out, frightfully punished, and sent to hell by the master – Jesus. There should be no doubt that this person fell away into perdition.

Finally, let’s look at the parable of the banquet:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

⁴“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

⁵“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business.⁶ The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them.⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

⁸“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come.’ ⁹Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹²‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless.

¹³“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

¹⁴“For many are invited, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:2-14).

Jesus tells this parable to illustrate what the kingdom of heaven is like. The king held a great banquet, but the guests first invited didn't come. Angry, the king ordered that all be invited in, to go into the highways and byways to find those to fill up his banquet hall. When the king came in to see the guests, he saw a person not wearing wedding clothes. Let's examine for the moment this person. He was invited to the banquet. He accepted. BUT, he was not obedient to the terms of the invitation because he wasn't wearing wedding clothes. The king seemed surprised that he was able to get in without wedding clothes. What could the wedding clothes represent? We may find the meaning in Revelation:

⁷Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. ⁸Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

⁹Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” (Revelation 19:7-9).

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”

¹⁴ I answered, “Sir, you know.”

And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:13-14).

¹⁴“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city (Revelation 22:14).

These three passages of Scripture give great insight into what the wedding garments would be, what they represent, and even how they became white. The scriptures show that these are those who had righteous acts, represented in heaven by their bright and clean fine linen. We know their robes are white because they are washed in the blood of the Lamb.

When the parable speaks of the person who didn't have wedding clothes, it speaks of one who did not have the fine linen representing the righteous acts of the saints, nor had he washed the robe in the blood of the Lamb.

This parable apparently described a person who had accepted the invitation to the banquet, but who thereafter failed to prepare for the banquet. It is very similar to the fig tree and the branches

in the vine that were cut off for failing to produce fruit. This person had also not born fruit – did not have a robe that represented the righteous acts of the saints.

Can a person happily accept the invitation, profess faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord and be forever saved? This parable says not, as do all the other scriptures assembled here.

Salvation Issues

For the persons who believe or advocate or teach the doctrine of once saved, always saved, sooner or later when confronted with the Scripture, they are going to have to decide whether they will continue to have to distort the meanings of many passages of Scripture to conform to their doctrine, or whether they will believe and honor the Word of God as it is written, according to its plain meaning.

When dealing with salvation issues presented in Scripture, we may be at just such a point. If Jesus says a person will not be saved UNLESS, will the eternal security advocate insist each time that Jesus wasn't talking to us or that he was referring only to the unsaved or or or We certainly hope that such a person will not say that Jesus did not know what he was talking about or that he was simply mistaken or that Scripture is not accurate at that point.

At this very point, however, we come to a major misunderstanding within the church arising out of the interpretation of Ephesians 2:8-10:

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Perhaps there are few passages in Scripture that are more fundamental, but that have also been subject to such grave misinterpretations. We'll deal with only one misinterpretation here and that is the two words, "through faith." There are those who say that it is simple faith only that will save and nothing more. They insist adding anything else is adding a "works" salvation to the simple grace-filled message of the Gospel. And they are right! The Galatians were convinced by the Judaizers that they had to add to the Gospel observing the days, weeks, festivals, and circumcision of the Old Testament teachings. Paul forcefully told them they were wrong.

BUT, it is in the fundamental understanding of the word "faith" that so many make a mistake that can cost salvation. Faith is NOT mere mental assent. It is NOT simply believing that Jesus Christ died on the cross for my sins. It is NOT simply believing that Jesus is the Son of God. What, you cry?!? Heresy! Yes, you may have been taught that to require anything beyond those simple definitions of faith is heresy. Read on.

IF one could have salvation by simply having faith that Jesus died on the cross for one's sins, and there were no further requirement, then Jesus lied! OR, to rid themselves of Jesus' statements that conflict with their interpretation, some have claimed that Jesus' teachings were only for the Jews, that Paul is the one to whom we must listen as he went to the Gentiles. We know otherwise, however, because it was Jesus who commanded that the Gospel go to the Gentiles – "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). "All" nations refers to more than the Jews. It encompasses all the Gentile nations.

We come to an important cross-roads in interpretation. IF we are to agree that Jesus did not lie, that he knows full-well the true requirements for salvation, but that Paul's statement saying that salvation is "through faith" is also true, we must interpret this so they are compatible. And that is very simple to do.

Faith is not a simple mental assent. Faith is multi-faceted, much like a diamond. If you look at a diamond from a couple feet away, you see a single crystal-like stone. But if you look at it closely, you see there are facets all around it. Each one reflects the light. Is the diamond less a diamond because it has facets? Is a saving faith less a saving faith because there are facets to it? No.

How do we recognize a facet of a saving faith? Each facet is always stated as a condition of salvation. The text of Scripture will say that unless a person does a certain thing (for example) he will never enter the kingdom of God. Or, it may use the positive and say that only those who do a certain thing will enter the kingdom of God. We will look at both kinds of facets below. Suddenly you will see that each of the requirements for salvation taught by Jesus are part of the saving faith taught by Paul. We'll examine how these facets of a saving faith impact upon the doctrine of once saved, always saved.

Requirement of Obedience to the Will of God

At Matthew 7:21, Jesus states:

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

This is a passage that makes salvation conditional. The condition? Only those who do the will of God will enter the kingdom of heaven. Note it did not say that only those who once make a confession of faith will enter the kingdom of heaven. No, this is an active, continuing command – to do the will of God.

What is the will of God? For the New Testament believer, it is everything Jesus said and did. Over and over in the Gospel of John, Jesus said that everything he did and said was just what the God the Father told him to do and say (John 8:28, 12:49-50, 14:10, 14:24, 14:31). Thus everything Jesus commanded and taught is the will of God. It follows naturally that Jesus requires that all new believers be taught to obey the will of God – everything he commanded (Matthew 28:20). Is it corroborated elsewhere in Scripture that salvation is associated with obeying Jesus? Yes, of course! Hebrews 5:9 states that Jesus became the source of salvation for all who obey him.

Some seek to neutralize that command (to do the will of God) by saying that all we need obey is simply to love our neighbor as ourselves (the Royal Law, see James 2:8), choosing that command of Jesus. Others point to the summation Jesus gave:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40).

Though those two commands sum up the teachings of Scripture, Jesus taught much more. In some cases, he changed Old Testament law. In others, such as adultery, he expanded the

definition to include looking with lust at a woman. He taught dozens of commands for the people of his kingdom that teach us how we are to love our fellow man and how to love God our Father and Jesus our Lord. It is not our definition of how we are to love that matters. God defines the terms. At this very point of loving God and our neighbor God defines the terms very differently than we do. The Apostle John told us what love for God is:

²This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³This is love for God: to obey his commands (1 John 5:2-3).

Just as we found it is necessary to do the will of God – to obey God – we learn that the first and greatest command is to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind, AND that to love God is to obey his commands. What an interesting circle that is! There is no “love” for God that does not include obeying his commands. Everything Jesus taught and commanded is the will of God that we are to obey. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey me” (John 14:15) which agrees perfectly with the teach of the Apostle John.

Perhaps the greatest sin of the present-day church is its failure to do what Jesus told us to do – to make disciples of Jesus and to teach them to obey all that he commanded us.

What if the person who made a confession of faith chooses not to obey? Or worse, what if that person is taught that there is no need to obey, that those who claim that God requires us to obey are really advocating salvation by works – seeking to earn one’s way to heaven? Did Jesus tell the truth – that those who don’t obey will not enter the kingdom of heaven? Or are the advocates of unconditional eternal security correct, that all it requires for salvation is a one-time, heart-felt confession of faith?

The Requirement to Forgive

This command and teaching is not usually considered a salvation issue. But Jesus made it front and center as a salvation issue. In what we call the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus included, “^{d2}Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). Note that the request for forgiveness is based upon the extent to which we have forgiven others. Is there more? Yes, indeed.

Jesus makes sure we don’t miss the point. He continues:

¹⁴For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:14-15).

To understand how monumental this statement is, we must look all the way to the cross. Why did Jesus die on the cross? It was so our sins could be forgiven. Hebrews 9:22 tells us without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. IF we could have unforgiven sin and still get to heaven, then Jesus died in vain. There would be no need for the sinless lamb of God to be slain and his blood shed so we could be forgiven. We know it was necessary because Jesus asked God his Father to take the cup (of the death on the cross) from him, but conditioned that request by saying, “Not my will but your will be done” (Luke 22:42).

Can you accept that conclusion? There is more. In Matthew 18, you will remember the parable of the king who demanded an accounting from his servants. A servant owed the king

a vast sum that he was unable to pay, so he ordered the servant, his wife and children and all that he had to be sold to pay the debt. When the servant begged for mercy, the king cancelled the debt. However this same servant then accosted a fellow servant who owed him a small debt, demanded payment, refused mercy, and had him thrown into prison until he could pay. When the king heard about this gross injustice, he called in the wicked servant and said:

“‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.’³³ Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’³⁴ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed” (Matthew 18:32-34).

Is any believer ever turned over by God to be tortured until he can make atonement for his sins? Could we ever do that, no matter how long we were tortured? No! We are unable. Perhaps such an example is the basis for the false Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory.

Frightening for you and me is how Jesus concluded this parable in his teaching for you and me:

³⁵ “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart” (Matthew 18:35).

There is no forgiveness of sins for those who will not forgive. There is no salvation, no place in the kingdom of heaven for those who sins are not forgiven. When the Apostle John was shown the New Jerusalem, heaven itself, he was told: ²⁷ “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Revelation 21:27). To be pure, blameless and free from accusation (Col. 1:21-22), we must be forgiven!

What about the person who once made a sincere confession of faith? Later, for any number of reasons, he fails or refuses to forgive someone. Which is true? Is he still saved, because the doctrine of once saved, always saved requires that? Or is what Jesus taught true, that such a person has forfeited salvation rather than forgive another person. If the person knowingly chose to forfeit salvation, that is one thing, but I grieve for untold millions who are falsely told that they are already saved and will continue to be saved no matter what they do (or don’t do, e.g., forgive).

We sometimes see the issue of forgiveness dramatically played out before our eyes. Perhaps a murder has claimed the life of a loved one. Family members sometimes bitterly say, “I will NEVER forgive that murderer!” On the other hand, there are Christians who know and obey the Word of God. Their testimony shines like the sun as they say, “Jesus requires that I forgive him and I do forgive him.” There are notable cases where such family members went to the prison, reconciled with the killer, led the killer to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus, and befriended him when he was released from prison. How I wish all were as obedient to the teachings of our Lord Jesus!

How many people will rely on false doctrine of once saved, always saved for their salvation, believing they can nurture the bitter root of unforgiveness and still be saved? I fear there may be untold millions.

The Requirement of Repentance

The first command taught by Jesus was to repent (Matthew 4:17). Jesus later connected that command to salvation when he was told about Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus responded,

“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.⁴ Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:2-5).

Twice he repeated the same requirement. Surely he was not speaking of physical death as all the people to whom he spoke, whether or not they repented, would one day die a physical death.

Peter made repentance first on the list when he exhorted the people:

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Unfortunately, even here the need for repentance has been perverted by those who claim the false doctrine of once saved, always saved. It follows naturally that if a one-time confession of faith will create a right to salvation, no matter what happens thereafter, repentance for future sins is not necessary. Based on that false premise, these teachers claim that when we are initially repent and are forgiven our sins, the forgiveness is prospective (all future sins) as well as retrospective (all our past sins). Thus, all Scripture that commands us to confess our sins or repent of sins is meaningless for those who have once confessed faith. Our question always is, “What does Scripture say?”

Peter, in his second epistle, exhorted the believers to add to their faith goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. He said about them,

⁸For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins (2 Peter 1:8-9).

Yes, it is our past sins from which we have been cleansed when we repent. There is no Scripture that states we are forgiven of our future sins. That claim is an invention of men (or Satan). That is why we are to repent quickly each and every time we sin – to keep ourselves without blemish and free from accusation before God (Col 1:22).

We see this confirmed by the Apostle John when he assures us, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Is it possible to confess sins one has not yet committed? Yes, if one has the deliberate intent to commit sin one could confess it ahead of time, but we know that those who deliberately sin face judgment and a raging fire that will consume the enemies of God (Hebrews 10:26-27).

Without that exception, though, it is not possible to confess sins we have not yet committed.

We don't know what they will be. Thus we know the Apostle John is speaking about gaining

forgiveness of future sins by confessing them to God. He could also be speaking in the present tense to those who had need of forgiveness of past sins.

There is a clear call to believers to repent in six of the seven letters the Lord Jesus wrote to the seven churches – to Christians, recorded in chapters 2 and 3 of the Revelation. As an example, to the church at Laodicea he said, “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent” (Revelation 3:19). Are those letters only to the seven churches? Surely those letters were included so that we could all be instructed further by our Lord. They were certainly included so that we would know that believers must continue to repent when they sin.

Why would the churches have to repent if all their sins – even their future sins – had been forgiven? Obviously they wouldn't have to. If that were the case, Jesus is asking them to do something unnecessary. Are these teachers suggesting Jesus didn't understand? Or did Jesus forget that their future sins had been forgiven? Hopefully you will agree that cannot be the case. This is simply another case where the false doctrine of eternal security creates still other false claims that pervert the plain meaning of Scripture.

More Facets of a Saving Faith

We have seen that repentance, forgiveness, perseverance, and obedience are facets of a saving faith. Some others are:

- ❑ **We must be born again.** Jesus told Nicodemus, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3). Those who have a saving faith are born again. Can a person see the kingdom of God without being born again? No. Jesus stated it is an absolute requirement.
- ❑ **We must be righteous.** Jesus said: “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20). Speaking of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, Jesus said, “But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.” As followers of Jesus we must be doers, not speakers and hearers only, making sure our actions match our words. As James said, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22).
- ❑ **We must love Jesus more than any other person and than our own life.** “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). Our marching orders are “to make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Surely no one will suggest that we can be saved if we are not disciples of Jesus.
- ❑ **We must follow Jesus and be willing to suffer for him.** Jesus said, “And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:27). If we are not Jesus' disciples we cannot have eternal life.
- ❑ **We must give up everything we have.** Jesus taught: “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). We cannot have salvation unless we are Jesus' disciple.

- ❑ **We must never disown or deny Jesus.** Jesus said, “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33).
- ❑ **We must bear fruit.** Jesus warned: “He [God] cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:2).
- ❑ **We must remain in Jesus.** Jesus said, “If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned” (John 15:6).

What a responsibility we have as teachers in the church to make sure the people we lead to the Lord are aware of the facets of a saving faith! But some will even argue with that, saying it has to be more simple, that it is neither necessary or appropriate to explain to people all these teachings of Jesus.

Once again, “What does Scripture say?” Even more on point, “What does Jesus say?” Jesus spoke very clearly and specifically to this very point in Luke 14. The occasion was when he was telling the costs of being his disciple. He recited several of the ones we’ve noted above, loving him above all others, even than one’s own life and carrying his own cross. It is at that point that Jesus spoke about knowing the cost before committing to following him. He told a parable to make the point:

²⁸ “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish’” (Luke 14:28-30).

Likewise, should we begin to follow Jesus as our Lord without first realizing what this will mean? What will be expected and required of us if we decide to follow Jesus? Shouldn’t we know that before making a commitment? Of course! Jesus speaks of the one who begins to build the tower without knowing the cost and being unable to finish it as one who will invite ridicule. Likewise, we must decide that we are willing to pay whatever price the Lord demands of us if we choose to be his disciple and follow him.

But these same teachers often say there is no price. They claim the gift of salvation is absolutely free. Is it? The gift of salvation is freely given (Romans 3:24) and is available to all, but not everyone qualifies to receive this gift. Every one of the facets of a saving faith is a qualification that must be met in order to be saved. If you are unwilling to commit to those necessary qualifications, you cannot be a disciple of Jesus and you will not have salvation. It is sometimes stated that the gift of salvation is the most costly gift you will ever receive.

We know the cost of our gift of salvation to God. It cost the life of his son by crucifixion – the most extreme cost we can imagine. Did Jesus say there is no cost for us? The Lord Jesus continued in Luke 14 to answer that very assertion, again using a parable:

³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a

delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.³³ In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has **cannot be my disciple**” (Luke 14:31-33).

To properly understand this parable it is helpful to understand the conditions that existed in the days in which Jesus spoke of these things. We see the point Jesus is making best illustrated in the Old Testament when the Israelites were sometimes commanded by God to kill every living thing in the cities they conquered. With that thought in mind, consider the army of 20,000 coming against the one with 10,000. The king with 10,000 will realize his chance of succeeding is very poor. He knows that the other king can, and likely will, kill him and every one of his soldiers, and then take everything they have as booty, including their wives and children. That king will send emissaries to the king with 20,000 men and ask for terms of peace, offering himself and his men as slaves if only they can live. With that in mind, we can understand Jesus’ next statement:

³³ In the same way, any of you who does not **give up everything he has** cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:31-33).

A slave owns nothing. He only acts for his master. We are to be bond servants of our Lord Jesus who bought us with his blood (see Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23, and 2 Peter 2:1). A bond servant is a voluntary slave for life who makes a public confession of his willingness to be a bond servant of his master. It should be crystal clear that we must be disciples and make disciples. A disciple must give up everything he has! If we are unwilling to do that, we cannot be a disciple of the Lord Jesus! Shouldn’t we make that clear to those we seek to make disciples of our Lord Jesus? At law, the failure to declare that which is material to making a decision is called deceit.

The Requirement of Being Conformed to the Likeness of Jesus

Over these many years, in attempting to defend the false doctrine of once saved, always saved, its proponents have had to deny many core doctrines of Christianity. One they have great difficulty with is being a disciple as a necessity of gaining salvation. Because of the costs we’ve noted that are necessary for those who will follow Jesus as his disciples, some eternal security proponents claim that salvation is possible without being a disciple, by simply “believing” or having “faith.” Once again, “What does Scripture say?”

Jesus said he is our teacher (John 13:13), that we are not to be called teacher, for we have but one teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 23:10). Jesus taught that if he is our teacher and we are his students, then we are to be like him; as we are his servants and he our master, we are to be like him (Matthew 10:25). He assured us that everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher (Luke 6:40).

Paul stated a salvation requirement (another facet of the saving faith) at Romans 8:29:

²⁹ For those God foreknew he also **predestined** to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

God foreknows those who will be saved (1 Peter 1:1-2).⁵ God predestined a qualification for those who would be saved. They must be conformed to the likeness of his Son. If God

⁵ See the article “Foreknowledge or Predestination?” at www.bereanpublishers.com | False Doctrines | Calvinism |

predestines something, what does that mean? It means he is setting an advance requirement for something that must come to pass. What does that say about those who will be saved? It says such persons will be (they are predestined by God to be) conformed to the likeness of Jesus. In the limiting sense, it means only those who are conformed to the likeness of Jesus will be saved.

In what ways must we be conformed to the likeness of Jesus? Let's look at some examples:

Obedience. We have seen that Jesus was perfectly obedient to his Father. He did and said only what his Father told him to do. Likewise, Jesus says that no one will enter the kingdom of heaven who does not do the will of his Father. We are conformed to the likeness of Jesus as we are obedient to the will of God.

Take Up Our Cross. Jesus carried his cross and died on it. Likewise, we are to carry our cross (Luke 14:23) and die to self. As we do that, we are being conformed to the likeness of Jesus.

Give Up Everything We Have. Jesus gave up everything he had as God in heaven. Jesus being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness (Philippians 2:6-7). Jesus stated that, if we would be his disciples, we also must give up everything we have (Luke 14:33).

Love God Supremely. Jesus loved those who were obedient to the Father's will more than his family. When told that his mother and brothers were outside looking for him, Jesus asked the question,³³ "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.³⁴ Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"³⁵ Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:33-34). Likewise, Jesus said we are to love him so much more than earthly, human relationships that it is almost as if we hated our closest human relatives by comparison with our love for him (Luke 14:26). When we put first the kingdom of God and put first believers with a saving faith (our brothers and sisters), we are being conformed to the likeness of Jesus.

Class 200 on discipleship (one of the classes I've spoken about) lists three classifications of people relating to Jesus: Curious, Convinced, and Committed. The class teacher said (or implied) that those who are convinced and committed are saved. Is that true, based on what we've learned? Which of these three would be conformed to the likeness of Jesus? There is only one. It is only the Committed who will have salvation. Was Jesus only convinced? No, he was totally committed. Earlier we read his prayer to his Father to be relieved of the cross. Though he didn't want to go through the incredible suffering that was then clearly in view for him, he ended his prayer, "Not my will, but your will be done." That is committed.

Can we be merely convinced? James speaks of demons who are convinced: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder" (James 2:19). The demons are convinced. We know they have no salvation.

My own testimony includes being convinced before I was committed. After many years of being an agnostic/atheist, I began to read the Scriptures. One day I walked downstairs and was convinced the Scriptures were true; I believed that Jesus was the Son of God and that he had died on a cross for my sins. I thought I was a new believer and so did everyone else we knew. My life changed a little – I stopped swearing and gave up my party friends, but I had

no real fruit in my life, not the supernatural love, joy and peace that is the fruit of the Spirit God gives those who are born again. Then I learned from my personal study of Scripture that Jesus had to be my Lord and I had to obey him. After I asked him to be my Lord and promised to obey him the rest of my life (see John 14:15) my life was flooded with the fruit of the Holy Spirit (though at that time I didn't know what it was – I hadn't yet studied Galatians 5:22-23). It was only when I was committed that I had a saving relationship with Jesus.

Examples of Falling Away From the Faith

As always, we must look to Scripture for our answers. If there were never an example in Scripture of anyone falling away from the faith after confessing faith in the Lord Jesus, then we would have to seriously question our conclusions. Scripture proves itself. If God wants to make a point, he always gives us ample Scripture to show the truth he wants us to know.

Almost All of Israel

The writer to the Hebrews gives us insight into the spiritual condition of Israel after God brought them out of Egypt. As you remember, though God used mighty works to release his people from Pharaoh, their memory seemed very short. In the desert they seemed unable to trust God to act on their behalf, even though he had saved them many times before. The writer states:

⁷ So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts

as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, ⁹ where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did.

¹⁰ That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’ ¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

¹² See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness (Hebrews 3:7-14).

We know that God caused all the adults to die in the desert (with two exceptions) because of their rebellion against him. Though he gave them chance after chance, there came a time when their pleading fell on deaf ears. God would no longer forgive and save them. Likewise the writer exhorts his readers (he calls them brothers) not to have a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. Would he exhort them not to turn away if it were impossible for them to do so? The writer uses the example of the Old Testament judgment of God against a generation that did turn away with a sinful unbelieving heart.

King Saul

In the Old Testament we have the example of King Saul, chosen by God to be king. But his disobedience caused his downfall. In his latter years, he tried repeatedly to kill David, God's anointed. Ultimately he killed himself by falling on his sword. Scripture records that the Holy Spirit had departed from Saul. ‘Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him’ (1 Samuel 16:14).

The once saved, always saved advocate usually claims that once a person has made a confession of faith he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He goes further and refers to those verses in which the Holy Spirit is referred to as a deposit.

⁵ Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (2 Corinthians 5:5, see also 1:22 and Ephesians 1:14).

What few seem to realize is that the phrase, “guaranteeing what is to come” is NOT in the original text, but has been added (in this case by the translators of the NIV Bible). The eternal security advocates say that once the Holy Spirit is received and “guarantees what is to come” one can never lose what was guaranteed nor will the Holy Spirit ever leave.

We have just seen from Scripture, however, that the Holy Spirit departed from Saul when he was evil and disobedient to God. We have also seen that the notion of guaranteeing what is to come is an invention of the translators.

At law, deposits are given to show good faith. Actions and future behavior are not guaranteed on the basis of a deposit. The deposit shows the person’s strong intention to complete the transaction. The deposit is usually sufficient to help make the person who receives it whole (cover his expenses) in case the person giving the deposit defaults. It is also possible at law for the person who has received the deposit to give it back based on the default of the person who gave it or based on fraud or deceit by that person.

There is no warrant to claim that because the Holy Spirit has been given by God as a deposit to those with a saving faith that the Holy Spirit cannot later be withdrawn, as in the case of King Saul. An article which deals with this in much more depth is at www.bereanpublishers.com | False Doctrines | The Doctrine of Unconditional Eternal Security | A Deposit Guaranteeing Our Inheritance.

Demas

The New Testament is replete with examples of those who fell away. Paul wrote Timothy, “Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he **loved this world**, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica” (2 Timothy 4:9-10).

To understand the gravity of Paul’s charge against Demas, it is necessary to understand what Scripture says about those who love this world. The Apostle John explained that if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15). James spoke even more strongly: “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4).

Will anyone argue that someone who does not have the love of the Father in him (shown by deserting Paul), who has hatred toward God and who is an enemy of God is saved? Yes, strangely, those die-hard proponents of once saved, always saved often do claim that even though a person deserts the faith, they are still saved if they once made a confession of faith. Yes, that does contradict Scripture and makes Christians a laughing stock in the eyes of the world as even unbelievers can see such interpretation violates the plain language of Scripture.

Paul did not claim that Demas had never been a true believer. On the contrary, if someone had been with Paul in ministry, because of Paul’s spiritual gift of discernment, we could reasonably expect that he surrounded himself with strong believers.

Hymenaeus and Philetus

Paul warned Timothy about those who engage in godless chatter: “Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some”

(2 Timothy 2:17-18). We know there is the truth of God’s word and truth in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Can anyone be saved who has wandered away from Jesus and his word and is now destroying the faith of others?

Hymenaeus and Alexander

Paul exhorted Timothy to hold on to faith and a good conscience. Then he warned, “Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.²⁰ Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme” (1 Timothy 1:19-20).

Does a person with a shipwrecked faith have salvation? I contend the plain meaning is that they have lost their faith as a ship is lost in a shipwreck.

Danger for Recent Converts Who Are Made Overseers

When Paul enumerated the requirements for overseers, he commanded: “He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6). This is a most important statement to controvert the false doctrine of once saved, always saved.”

Paul warns that an overseer must not be *a recent convert*, assuming his conversion was real. He makes no qualification about that. The person may show leadership ability and a desire to serve. But Paul knows that maturity in the faith is necessary so such a person does not become prideful by being given authority too quickly.

It is surprising how quickly Paul’s warning goes from referring to a new convert, to concern about being conceited, to falling under the same judgment as the devil. Paul demolishes the notion of many false teachers of the eternal security doctrine that such a person will simply lose rewards but not his salvation. Paul says the fate of such a person is **the same judgment as the devil** — *to be thrown into the lake of fire* (Revelation 20:10).

Young Widows

Paul shared with Timothy his insight about young widows:

“As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to. So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan” (1 Timothy 5:11-15).

Paul does not suggest that these young widows were not once true Christians. He speaks of their dedication to Christ. But the desires of the flesh and bad habits can lead to a sinful life. Paul says he knows of instances where they left their dedication to Christ to follow Satan.

Is anyone saved who has turned away from the faith to follow Satan? Isn't salvation through faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord? (Luke 14:27; Romans 6:23; Acts 20:21, Eph. 2:8-9). It can't be both ways. It is either following Jesus or following Satan.

Those Who Are Eager For Money

Paul also warned about those eager to become wealthy. "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, *have wandered from the faith* and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:10).

Prophecy of Falling Away in Later Times

Paul shared his prophetic insight into the future: "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (1 Timothy 4:1). Only a person who has something can abandon it. Paul sees through the Spirit that in later times believing Christians will leave the faith for false doctrines.

Some Wandered Away Professing Opposing Ideas

A final warning closed Paul's first letter: "Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you" (1 Timothy 6:21-22).

Warning to Timothy

Knowing the need to remain true to the faith, Paul urged Timothy: "Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:15-16). Surely Paul knew that Timothy was a true believer. Nevertheless, he felt it necessary to remind him that he must persevere in the faith in order to be saved. Note that he made even Timothy's salvation conditional upon perseverance. Again there is IF.

Conclusion

My intention when I began this article was to quickly show that there are many scriptures and principles in Scripture to prove the falsity of the doctrine of unconditional eternal security (once saved, always saved). Though I believe I succeeded in showing many proofs, far beyond reasonable doubt, to prove there is no biblical doctrine as once saved, always saved, I did not succeed in making this short. May you be blessed in spite of its length.

There are many more illustrations showing that perseverance is necessary for salvation. From the same teachings we learn that many fall away from the faith. Those who fall away are not saved, contrary to the false assurances of many. Some will fall away through persecution, through the pleasures of the world, from worry, anxiety, lack of fruit, and the failure to remain in Jesus.

I believe most will fall away because the true gospel was never presented to them. It was a false, ear-tickling gospel they heard that promised them salvation if they only confessed faith in Jesus as their Savior and Lord, and were promised that they would never lose that salvation. The salvation issue, these teachers assure, is settled. The only issues that remain are whether they will have an abundant life here on earth and how many rewards they get in heaven.

The prospect of a fiery hell for failing to produce fruit, for continuing in sin, for falling away due to a myriad of reasons is not emphasized to them. Instead, sadly, yes, tragically, they are assured the opposite – that they need have no fear of judgment nor fear of God, that they are destined only for the Bema judgment – the judgment seat of Christ for believers. Sadly those who fall away will never see that judgment seat. They will be raised to a white throne judgment only to find their name is not written in the Lamb's book of life and they will be cast into the lake of fire.

My greatest fear is that this false doctrine is inoculating many from ever receiving the Gospel with a saving faith. The U.S. in particular is filled with a high percentage of people who claim to be Christians but have no evidence of their faith in their daily life. When asked, they believe they are Christians, but they have no fruit. But because of the false doctrine of once saved, always saved, their minds are closed to hearing the truth about salvation and what is required in order to have a saving faith. They believe they are saved and such conversation is only for those not yet saved. Satan has succeeded in creating a barrier against the Gospel. For some the barrier appears to be impenetrable.

Let's return to the simple, plain meaning of Scripture as our guide to faith and conduct. The clever arguments of man are just that – of man. Salvation comes from God and comes only in the way he has specified.

This false doctrine has combined with others in its attempt to deceive. The stepchild of once saved, always saved is antinomianism – lawlessness. If one cannot be “unsaved” once a sincere confession of faith has been made, it naturally follows that what is done afterward cannot affect salvation. Paul's description of himself in Romans 7, which is widely misunderstood, adds to that impression. For a thorough discussion of Romans 7, please see www.bereanpublishers.com | False Doctrines | Misunderstood | Romans 7 Revisited. Directly on point to the issue of continuing in sin, see www.bereanpublishers.com | False Doctrines | The Doctrine of Unconditional Eternal Security | Can Sinning Cost Salvation? The doctrine of once saved, always saved may have come from Calvinism as one of its illegitimate stepchildren. I suggest www.bereanpublishers.com | False Doctrines | Calvinism | Foreknowledge or Predestination? as an article that will clarify that issue and debunk the false claims of Calvinism. It will define from Scripture the terms elect and chosen.

May our God richly bless you as you persevere in a saving faith and produce much fruit, as you remain steadfast and firm in the Lord Jesus, to the glory of God the Father.
